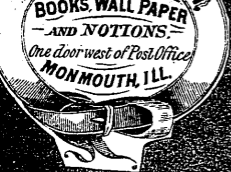


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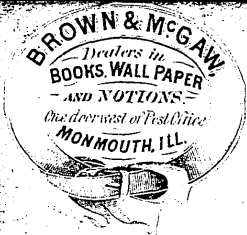
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To
Rev Janet Paul
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Sept 28/68 Authors

AN INQUIRY

INTO THE

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

IN THE

CHURCH OF CHRIST.

BY

DAVID A. WALLACE,

MONMOUTH, ILL.

PITTSBURGH:

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THE Author, with much hesitation, sends forth this little volume. He asks for it a careful reading and candid judgment. If it shall help any earnest inquirer to a clearer and more satisfactory understanding of the subject of which it treats, he will not feel that his labor has been in vain.

D. A. W.

MONMOUTH, ILL., April, 1868.

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PART FIRST.

THE LAW OF MEMBERSHIP

Ordained by Christ.


AN INQUIRY INTO THE

Qualifications for Membership

IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES.

1.  HE society, concerning whose terms of membership we are inquiring, is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was instituted by him; he ordained its constitution, defining its aim, its ordinances, and its officers. He intended it to do his own work, in his own way, and for his own glory. He himself is its only Head and Lawgiver. The Church is not a voluntary society, whose constitution and laws may be annulled or modified at the pleasure of its members.

10 QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP.

2. The end of the Church is the glory of God in the salvation of souls. It seeks to accomplish this object mainly by the exhibition of the truth, by the maintenance of ordinances, and by the administration of discipline.

3. In order to the attainment of this end, unity is essential. Internal divisions, variances, and antagonisms, in respect to the doctrine, government, worship, or discipline of the Church, are fatal to its efficiency. We may, therefore, expect to find that such qualifications for membership have been prescribed as are most likely to secure this unity.

4. Admission to the membership of the Church, is by the Lord's servants. In relation to this principle there is very general agreement. Some hold, that to judge of the qualifications of applicants for membership, is the duty of the pastor; others, of the brotherhood in Church meeting assembled; and still others, of the elders of the Church, in session assembled. But few, if any, claim that admission should be granted to all who apply; or, that the applicant himself is the final judge of his

own qualifications. None may be admitted to membership in the Church but by the final act of the Lord's servants.

5. The Lord's servants in admitting men to membership in the Church, and in continuing them in it, must be governed by the Lord's laws. They have no right to add to, take from, or modify these laws. It is their duty to ascertain and administer them.

6. This inquiry does not relate to infant, but to adult membership.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAWS OF CHRIST CONCERNING QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN HIS CHURCH.

WHAT then are the laws which the Lord Jesus Christ has ordained to regulate admission to membership in his Church? In order to answer this question, we will examine the statute law, the method of its administration by the founders of the Church, the directions given by the Apostles, and the practice of the primitive Christians.

SECTION I.—*The Statute.*

We find the fundamental law on this subject in the great commission itself: "GO YE, THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST; TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU."

Here we have three things: 1. "*Teach all nations.*" This is a command to make all nations disciples, or *followers of the doctrine of Christ.** 2. "*Baptizing them, &c.*" Here we have a command to baptize, and thus admit to the membership of the Church, all who had previously been made followers of Christ's doctrine. 3. "*Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*" Here is a command to instruct those admitted to the Church, in all that Christ had revealed; to lead them on to a full knowledge of truth and duty.

Now in relation to this great fundamental law, let it be noted: 1. The first duty of the apostles, in carrying out their commission, was to teach the nations the doctrine of Christ, and persuade them to receive and obey it. 2. In order to admission to membership in the Church, they could not require candidates to know and understand every thing Christ had revealed. They might

* Parkhurst defines the term here translated "teach," to mean, "to be a disciple to, or follower of, another's doctrine;" Campbell, "to convert;" Norton and Scrivener, "to make disciples; Britschneider, "*discipulum facio*;" and Robinson, "to train as a disciple."

admit men ignorant of many things. 3. As far, however, as they knew the doctrine of Christ, they were required to receive and obey it, otherwise they would not be disciples. 4. There is here not even a hint that the apostles were at liberty to admit any who refused to receive or obey any part of the doctrine of Christ. 5. Members were received with the view of being taught all that Christ had commanded; of course, therefore, were required to have the teachable, submissive spirit of scholars in his school. 6. Becoming a disciple of Christ implies faith in him, and repentance for sin. This act also implies subjection to his authority.

This is unquestionably the import of what may be regarded as the fundamental law concerning the qualifications for membership in the Church of Christ.

SECTION 2.—*The Administration of the Statute by the Founders of the Church.*

The facts of the first act of administration under the law of the great commission are on record in Acts 2. Multitudes pricked in their hearts by the words they had heard, “said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles,

Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized."

1. Now what did Peter and the other apostles require? The record makes this point clear. The term "*repentance*" includes it all. But "*repentance*" is "a change of mind;" "a change of mind" in respect to Christ, in respect to the past, and in respect to the future. Such "a change of mind" would involve faith in Christ, penitence for sins, a belief in the doctrine of Christ, and a full purpose to "walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." It would make them disciples; "followers of the doctrine" of Christ.

2. What did the baptized do? "*They gladly received his word.*" This was exacted as a condition precedent to their admission to membership in the Church. How fully Peter explained the doctrine and law of

Christ, in the "many other words with which he testified and exhorted," we have no means of knowing. This much, however, is clear: they that were baptized fully accepted the principles propounded by Peter and the other apostles as the doctrine and law of Christ, and placed themselves in subjection to the government and discipline he had established in the Church, as well as put their faith in Christ and repented of their sins. So much for the first case of the administration of the law by the founders of the Church.

Another case is on record in Acts 8. "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto the people there. And they, with one accord, gave heed unto those things which Philip spake. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done."

Philip "*preached Christ;*" he preached "*the things concerning the kingdom of God*

and the name of Jesus Christ." In so doing he doubtless expounded both the doctrine and law of Christ, and to these, in believing, the people of Samaria gave their assent, and on their profession, they were admitted to the Church. Their qualifications were identical with the qualifications of the multitudes baptized on the day of Pentecost. They became "followers of the doctrine" of Christ, consequently, the subjects of faith and repentance as well as the government of his Church.

In the same chapter we have another example of Philip's administration. It is the case of the Ethiopian eunuch. He had been at Jerusalem worshipping. He was on his return. As he journeyed he was reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. When at the fifty-third chapter, Philip joined him, and was invited to come up and sit with him in his chariot, and explain the words of the prophet. "Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way they came unto a certain water, and the eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be

baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him."

The formal profession made by the eunuch was of faith in the simple proposition, "*Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*" Now the profession both of the multitudes on the day of Pentecost and of the people of Samaria, included much more than this; a man might make such a profession and be an impenitent, unbelieving sinner. On a naked assent to this proposition, no man would be admitted to membership in any evangelical Church; the briefest creeds in the land include more. And yet, that profession satisfied Philip, who had just received the people of Samaria on a profession of faith in "the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ," which he preached. Now, how was it? Let us examine the case closely. 1. This Ethiopian, whether a proselyte or not, was a pious Jew; such an one as "the just and devout Simeon," or Anna,

the prophetess, "waiting for the consolation of Israel." The facts of the case prove this. 2. When he met Philip he believed in the Messiah to come. There was but one point of difference between them; that related to the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. 3. Philip reasoning from the prophecy of Isaiah, proved to the satisfaction of the eunuch, that this Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. 4. The confession, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,*" brought him into full harmony with Philip and the Church of Christ in his views of truth and duty. He was not admitted receiving a part, and rejecting a part, of the things propounded by Philip. He became a disciple, "a follower of the doctrine" of Christ; and on this ground was welcomed to the fellowship of his Church.

We find another example of Peter's administration in the case of Cornelius. It is on record in Acts 10. Peter, in obedience to the command of God signified in a vision, accompanied the messengers of Cornelius to his residence. There he found many "present before God to hear all things commanded him of God." "Peter opened his mouth and preached unto them Jesus."

The notes of his discourse are sufficiently full to satisfy us that it was eminently doctrinal. While Peter yet spake these words the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. They spake with tongues and magnified God. Because they had received the Holy Ghost, they were baptized. In the next chapter it is said that these Gentiles "received the word of God," and that God had granted them repentance unto life. There can be no question as to the substantial facts of this case. These Gentiles believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; they repented of their sins. They received the word propounded by Peter as the doctrine and law of Christ; they rejected nothing; in entering the Church they became subject to the government and discipline established in it by Christ.

Thus Peter administered the law of the great commission in receiving the first Gentile converts to the fellowship of the Church.

In Acts 16 we have an example of Paul's method of administration. Paul and Silas had been preaching "certain days" in Philippi. In consequence of a tumult, they were cast into prison. Frightened by an

earthquake and the consequent opening of the prison doors, the keeper of the prison "came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" To this question Paul and Silas replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house." The historian informs us that "he was baptized and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house." Now in relation to this case the following facts must be noticed: 1. They required the jailor to believe, and spake unto him and all his the word of the Lord. 2. The jailor believed and was baptized. 3. But what is it to believe on Christ? There is not much difference of opinion about the answer. It is a receiving and trusting in Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King. Thus the jailor believed. Receiving Christ as his Prophet, he accepted as the truth of God the doctrine which he taught; receiving Christ as his Priest, he secured pardon and life, through his righteousness; and receiving Christ as his King, he became obedient to his laws and

subject to his government. We do not find from this case that Paul required or accepted any other or lower qualifications for membership in the Church, than Peter or Philip.

In Acts 5 it is declared that "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women;" and in Acts 6, that "the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." Here it will be noted that those added to the Church are described as "disciples," as "believers," and as "obedient to the faith."

We are therefore authorized to conclude that the founders of the Church uniformly required of applicants for membership satisfactory evidence of the following qualifications: 1. Faith in Jesus Christ. 2. Repentance unto life. 3. A belief of the doctrine of Christ. 4. Obedience to the law of Christ. 5. Subjection to government established by Christ in his Church. Those received by the founders of the Church solemnly professed these things.

SECTION III.—*Directions given to the Church concerning Membership in it.*

1. *Concerning belief in Doctrine.*—In Romans 16:17, 18, we find the following: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences *contrary to the doctrine* which ye have learned; *and avoid them.*” A certain system of doctrine had been preached to the Romans. Some among them maintained doctrines in some respect different, and thus caused divisions and offences. Paul directed the Romans to “avoid them.” If such were in the Church, they were to be cast out; if out, refused admittance. Let the phrase “avoid them” mean what it may, it certainly implies this much. “Avoid them;” and why? Simply because, teaching a doctrine contrary to that the Romans had received as the doctrine of Christ, they caused “divisions and offences.”

In Gal. 1 we have another very decided expression of the mind of the Apostle. The eighth and ninth verses are as follows: “But though we or an angel from heaven preach *any other gospel* unto you than that which we have

preached unto you, let him be *accursed*. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach *any other gospel* unto you than that ye have received, let him be *accursed*." The Galatians had received a system of truth known as "the Gospel." Paul regarded their holding and maintaining this truth of such importance, that he denounces the teachers of a contrary system as "*accursed*." It is not necessary for us to expound the exact import of this term. It at least means that the teacher of "another gospel" should not be received into the Church, or if in it, permitted to remain. It would be difficult to find more emphatic language than that here used by Paul.

In 1 Timothy 6:3-5, Paul commands Timothy to *withdraw himself* from every man who taught otherwise than Paul had taught, "and consented not to *wholesome words*, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to *the doctrine* which is according to godliness." Here again holding and maintaining false doctrine is set forth as a good and sufficient reason for exclusion from the Church of Christ.

Paul in his epistle to Titus 3:10, says:

“A man that is an *heretic*, after the first and second admonition, *reject*.” A “heretic” is one who takes up any doctrine in opposition to, or inconsistent with the truths of the gospel. Such an one Paul directs Titus to reject, because he “is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself.” Heresy disqualifies for membership in the Church.

John’s second epistle contains another pointed passage to the same effect. “Who-soever transgresseth, and abideth not in *the doctrine of Christ*, hath not God. If there come any unto you, and bring not *this doctrine*, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed ; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” This passage certainly fully authorizes the conclusion that he who rejects the doctrine of Christ is not qualified for membership in his Church.

Our Lord in his epistle to the Angel of the Church in Pergamos, rebukes him for retaining in fellowship those who held the doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans. What these doctrines were is not material in this discussion, but they were such as disqualified for membership in the Church.

Such are the directions that have been given to the Church concerning belief in doctrine as a qualification for Church membership.

Their import is obvious. The Lord has given his Church a system of truth, variously called "the Faith," "the Word of God," "the Gospel," "the Doctrine of Christ," &c. Those who would be admitted to the fellowship of the Church, must receive this as far as they understand it. Those who reject it, should be rejected from the Church.

2. *Concerning obedience to the Law of Christ.*—A few testimonies on this point will be sufficient.

In 1 Cor. 5: 9–11, Paul thus admonishes the Church of Corinth: "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." Such characters were

not to be retained in the fellowship of the Church.

Again, Paul thus counsels Timothy: "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but destitute of the power thereof; from such turn away." Those possessing these traits of character were regarded as unfit for membership in the Church of Christ.

Christ has given his people a law. Obedience to it is required of those who apply for admission to the fellowship of the Church. They who refuse obedience should be rejected.

3. *Concerning subjection to the Government Christ has established in his Church.*—The mind of Christ on this subject is very explicitly stated by Paul in his epistles to the Thessalonians and to the Hebrews. To the Thessalonians he thus writes: "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which

labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake." To the Hebrews, thus: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account." The Lord Jesus Christ has established a government in the Church, and it is his pleasure that its members should submit to it. Those, therefore, who refuse to know and obey them appointed to rule in the Church, and to submit themselves, cannot be admitted to membership, without disregarding the letter and the spirit of these directions, given by Paul to the Thessalonians and Hebrews.

SECTION IV.—*The Practice of the Primitive Church.*

King, in his "Enquiry into the Constitution, &c., of the Primitive Church," gives the following account of "admission into Church fellowship:"* "Now those persons who designed to leave Heathenism and Idolatry, and desired to be members of a Christian Church, were not presently advanced to

* Chap. VI, sec. 1.

that degree, but were first continued in the rank of the catechumens, or the catechised ones. These were Candidates of Christianity, who were to stay some time in that order, for these two reasons: The one was, that they might be catechised and instructed in the Articles of the Christian Faith, from whence they were called *Catechumens*: And the other was, that they might *give demonstrations of the reality of their intentions, by the change of their Lives and the Holiness of their Conversations*. Whilst they were in this estate, they were at first privately instructed at home, till they understood the more Intelligible Principles of Christianity, and then they were admitted into the first rank of Catechumens. They were permitted to *come into the Church, where they stood in a place by themselves, and were present at the Sermons, which were adapted to their capacities, being discourses of the ordinary and less mysterious truths of the gospel*. If they behaved themselves well in this rank, they were advanced to the superior rank of the *Perfect*, who stayed, not only at the Lessons and Sermons, but also at the Prayers, which were the conclusion of the first service; and

in a little time were baptized, and tarried with the Faithful at the Celebration of the Eucharist." In confirmation of this account, King quotes from Origen and Tertullian. Again, quoting Justin Martyr as authority, our author says:* "*The Catechumens were instructed in the Christian Faith until they had given Proofs of their good Resolutions to lead a pious, religious life, and had protested their Assent and Consent to all the Christian verities, and then they were solemnly baptized.*" "The person to be baptized was first asked several Questions by him that officiated, unto which he was to give his answers. Which Questions Firmilean styles *the lawful and usual interrogatories of Baptism.* Now these questions were twofold: First, of Abjuration of the Devil and all his works. And, Secondly, of a firm Assent to the Articles of the Christian Faith;" "to which he answered, Yes." "Justin Martyr writes that those who were baptized were to give their Assent to the things that were taught and held by them." Justin Martyr also says, "that baptism is

* Part II, chap. III, sec. 3, 4. The capitals and italics are King's.

only given to those who to their Confession of Faith added also a promise or vow that they would live according to the rules of Christianity. Hence, that usual form of words in their profession, 'I give myself up to thee, O Christ, to be governed by thy laws.'"* Bingham informs us that the profession of the baptized was made in the most solemn and public manner, with hands and eyes lifted up to heaven, and subscribed with their own hands in the books of the Church.†

This account shows clearly that the primitive Church, in administering the law of membership, required as pre-requisites to admission, holiness of life, and an "assent to the Articles of the Christian Faith."

In confirmation of this conclusion we have the declaration of Dr. John M. Mason:‡
 "The unity of the primitive Church was evinced and preserved chiefly by an inflexible adherence to the great truths of the gospel, as summed up in her creed. Here wash er 'ONE faith,' *with which shep ermitted no tampering.* This faith her members, all the world over, were expected, and re-

* Bingham's Antiquities, vol. 1, p. 518.

† Id. 520, 521.

‡ Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 115.

quired, not merely to abstain from denying, which is at best but a negative assurance, but also to embrace and profess.”

SECTION V.—*Great Principles.*

Having thus examined the original law of membership given by our Lord in the great commission, the method in which Peter, Philip and Paul understood and administered this law, the directions given by the apostles to the Churches under their care, and the practice of the primitive Church, we are prepared to state the great principles by which the officers of the Church ought to be governed in receiving men to its fellowship, and in continuing them in it.

The great law of membership in the visible Church, requires of the candidate for admission:—

1. A profession of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his own Saviour. He who refuses such a profession should be rejected.

2. A profession of repentance unto life. He who refuses to make such a profession should be rejected.

3. A profession of belief in the doctrine of Christ. He who refuses to make such a profession should be rejected.

4. A profession of obedience to the law of Christ in heart and in life. He who refuses to make such a profession should be rejected.

5. A profession of subjection to the government and discipline which Christ has established in his Church. He who refuses to make such a profession should be rejected.

From these great principles we are authorised to draw certain inferences :

1. To inquire after all the other qualifications of membership in the Church, and omit subjection to its government and discipline, does not meet the requirements of the law. The candidate may make a credible profession of faith in Christ ; there may be no doubt but that he has truly repented, he may be sound in the faith, he may maintain such a walk and conversation as the gospel requires ; and yet, if for any reason he is not willing to own and acknowledge subjection to the authority Christ has established in the Church, he cannot be received. A member, enjoying the rights and privileges of membership, while refusing to bear the responsibility of a member, would be an anomaly in any society. The Lord has not organized his Church on any such principle.

2. To inquire after all the other qualifications of membership, and omit belief in the doctrine of Christ, does not meet the requirements of the law. In the great commission, the administration and instructions of the apostles, as well as in the practice of the primitive Church, special prominence is given to this qualification; and with good reason. Some knowledge of the doctrine of Christ is absolutely necessary to any exercise of Christian grace; as men's belief changes, their feelings and conduct change; feeble convictions are fatal to energetic action. A full, clear and correct knowledge of the whole doctrine of Christ is essential, "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Unity in the faith is indispensable to that unity on which the efficiency of the Church in the world depends. Any scheme of Church membership, therefore, that excludes or ignores a careful inquiry into the doctrinal belief of the candidate for Church membership, is fundamentally erroneous.

3. To inquire after evidence of the candidate's interest in Christ, merely, does not meet the requirements of the law.

(1.) The design of the Church is to do the Lord's work in the world—to bring men to Christ, and promote their sanctification, mainly by teaching them the truth as it is in Jesus. In this work, all, officers and members, should co-operate. Their specific work is to bring men to believe the whole doctrine and obey the whole law of Christ. But no Church can be efficient in propagating any truth unless its members are themselves united in its belief; nor in leading others to obey any law, unless they are themselves united in obeying it. Churches, one half antislavery and the other half proslavery in principle and practice, were not very active in promoting the truth on the great question of human rights. A Church, partly Arminian and partly Calvinian, each section detesting and opposing the doctrines of the other, would do very little in maintaining a testimony for the "doctrines of grace." But additional illustrations are unnecessary. Unity in the doctrine and in the law of Christ is essential to an effective Church. The admission of members, and the administration of word and ordinances, should, therefore, be so conducted as to secure this

unity. A man may give satisfactory evidence that he has been born again, and yet his principles, character or conduct be such, that to receive him to the Church, or continue him in it, would not be for edification, but for destruction. Constitute a Church of Episcopalians, high and low; of Methodists, Episcopal, Protestant and Wesleyan; of every sect of Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians; let the membership of this Church be made up of men of clear, deep, conscientious convictions, such as we commonly find in every evangelical denomination—could they work together harmoniously and effectively? would not difficulties arise at the very outset, which would render easy, earnest, successful work impossible? A sermon could hardly be preached, a member admitted, a Sabbath school organized, a prayer meeting conducted, or the Lord's Supper administered, without violating the cherished belief of some, and sowing the seeds of division. Indeed, they could hardly commence thier organization without finding separation to be an inevitable necessity, a solemn duty. Are these things so; and shall admission to the membership of the

Church be conducted on a principle that would lead to the utter destruction of internal unity, and to ultimate division?

It is manifest, therefore, that in admitting members to the Church, we must not confine our inquiries to evidences of a gracious state; we must require additional qualifications.

(2.) A man may be born again, and yet his conduct be such as to afford a good and sufficient reason for excluding him from the fellowship of the Church.

Christian men may, and do sin; their consciences at the same time condemning them. David was doubtless a child of God when he committed those scandalous sins in the matter of Uriah. They were certainly such as to have justified his suspension from membership in the Church. Cases of the kind have often occurred. And certainly a man who is in the Church should be suspended; if out of it, should not be received.

Again, Christian men may and do sin, honestly believing at the same time that they are walking in the way of God's commandments; and yet their sins may be such as to justify their exclusion from the membership of the Church. Men of God have

lived polygamists. A Christian man, even at this day, might not be able to see that polygamy is contrary to the mind of Christ, and live in it; and yet there is not a Church in the land that would receive him as a member. Men of God have held slaves. Men, even in our own day, have been masters, under the most abominable slave laws that ever existed, whose Christianity few would doubt; and yet many Churches excluded all such from membership. Godly men have conducted breweries and distilleries. It is a possible thing, certainly, that a true Christian might engage in that kind of manufacturing even now; and yet he would find it very difficult to obtain membership in any evangelical Church. But Paul settles this question. In 2 Thessalonians 3: 6, we find the following passage: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received from us. * * For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busy-bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort

by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread. * And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." The trouble at Thessalonica was this: There were some lazy, indolent men in the Church who would not work, but who, after the manner of their kind, preferred devouring the substance of their brethren. Paul commanded the Church to withdraw from such. Disobedience to this order disqualified for Church membership; and yet the apostle says, "count him not as an enemy, but admonish him *as a brother.*" If he had regarded this conduct, which he so sharply rebukes, as decisive evidence of his want of interest in Christ, he would have hardly added this exhortation. But there can be no question on this point. The natural sloth of some men is so intense as to require a large measure of grace to make them "diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord."

(3.) Such a knowledge and belief of the truth as is necessary to constitute the basis

of saving faith, cannot be shown to be all that we are authorized to require in order to membership in the Church; on the contrary, the rejection of truth, a belief of which is not necessary to a gracious state, may be a sufficient reason for rejecting an applicant for membership.

We find evidence in proof of this proposition in the word of God.

It cannot be shown that the great commission requires the disciple to receive nothing, a belief of which is not necessary to saving faith in order to baptism. On the contrary, it will hardly be questioned that it authorized the rejection of all who refused to receive anything Christ taught.

It cannot be shown that Peter's "many other words," which the baptized gladly received, on the day of Pentecost, included nothing but truth, without a knowledge of which they could not become true believers. On the contrary, none who rejected anything Peter preached that day would have been baptized.

The directions which the apostles gave the Churches for their guidance, are sufficiently explicit on this point.

Did Paul, when he exhorted the Romans to "avoid those who caused divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which they had learned," and warned the Galatians against "another gospel," mean only that doctrine a belief of which is necessary to saving faith, and leave them at liberty to hold and teach as they pleased on all other subjects? Evidently not; the terms used cover the whole doctrine they had been taught. Did Paul, in his epistle to Timothy, mean by "wholesome words," and the "doctrine according to godliness," only those few simple truths necessary to saving faith? Did John mean no more by "the doctrine of Christ," in relation to which he so earnestly exhorted the elect lady? Is no "heretic" to be "rejected," but one who refuses to accept that truth without which a man cannot be a Christian at all? Was it impossible for one "holding the doctrine of the Nicolaitans" to be a true believer? The answer to these questions seems obvious. The apostle's requirements extended to the whole doctrine of Christ. A man might hold all that was necessary to saving faith, and be himself a true believer, and still so

far and in such a sense, reject the truth, as to compel the Church, in obedience to the command of our Lord and his apostles, to reject him from their fellowship.

(4.) The Church has not been accustomed to act on the principle of regarding evidence of a gracious state as a sufficient qualification for membership.

Such was not the practice of the primitive Church. We have already seen with what explicitness and solemnity an assent to the creed was required. That creed was substantially what is now known as the Apostles' Creed. Let that and other creeds used in the primitive Church in the admission of members, be examined, and three things will be noticed: 1. They were not composed with the view of setting forth the truth necessary to be known in order to saving faith. "The different articles were inserted in opposition to heresies as they sprung up in the Church."* They do not profess to contain a summary of "essential" truth. 2. There is truth, not contained in these creeds, without a knowledge of which, saving faith is impossible. The apostles' creed does not set forth

*King's Enquiry, part II, chap. III, sec. 8.

Christ as A SAVIOUR at all ; the doctrine of the atonement is not in it ; there is no allusion to the necessity of regeneration, of faith, or of repentance, or of justification by faith. No sinner could ever learn the way of salvation from that creed. 3. There are points set forth in these creeds, a knowledge of which never was claimed to be essential to a gracious state. Must a man believe in "the Holy Catholic Church" in order to be in a gracious state? Must he understand the doctrine of "communion of saints" and of Christ's "descent into hell," or be damned?

The primitive Church could not therefore have practiced on the principle we are controverting.

Again : In all ages and everywhere in christendom, baptism has been required in order to membership in the Church, and yet by but very few has baptism been regarded as necessary to salvation.

Again : There always have been, and doubtless still are in the Church of Rome, many of God's* children, many who could satisfy any reasonable Church court of their interest in Christ ; and yet there are but few who would consent to the admission of a

member of that communion, while refusing to renounce its faith and fellowship.

Again: A man may put his faith in Christ for salvation, and be a humble, devoted Christian, and still believe that all men will at last be saved through Christ. But what evangelical Church is accustomed to admit to membership the believer in the doctrine of universal salvation?

Again: The Westminster Divines define the visible Church "*to consist of all who profess the true religion, together with their children.*"* A profession of "the true religion," certainly includes more than a satisfactory evidence of a change of heart.

Again: The Presbyterian Board of Publication, in commenting on the article just quoted, say that the officers of the Church should inquire carefully, "whether or not the applicant for sealing ordinances furnishes the ordinary evidences of a gracious state of heart, of a correct Christian deportment, and of a competent knowledge of the great system of revealed truth."† Here it will be observed that three distinct things are named,

* Conf. of Faith, chap. XXV, 2.

† Shaw's Exposition, p. 289.

two of which are *additional* to evidence of a gracious state. In giving directions in relation to the formation of new congregations, the Presbyterian General Assembly use the following language: "The individuals ascertained to be desirous and prepared to associate as a Church of Christ, should now by some public formal act, such as rising, joining hands, or subscribing a written statement, *agree and covenant to walk together in a Church relation, according to the acknowledged doctrines and order of the Presbyterian Church.*"* Should any refuse thus to covenant they must of course be refused membership, however well those who are organizing the Church may be satisfied of their gracious state.

In 1853 the following question was propounded to the Assembly: "Is a Church session authorized, by the principles laid down in the Confession of Faith, to admit individuals to the Lord's Table who do not subscribe to the doctrines and submit to the discipline of the Church?" The Assembly, in their reply said: "Every session must judge for themselves of that degree of knowledge of

* Assembly's Digest, p. 56.

Christian doctrine and adherence thereto on the part of those examined by them, which may render their reception suitable and for their own edification and for the peace of the Church.”* Here it is taught that sessions are to inquire not merely for such knowledge and belief as they may judge necessary to a gracious state, but for such additional knowledge of Christian doctrine and adherence thereto, as may render their reception *suitable and for their own edification and the peace of the Church.*” In 1834 the Assembly declared, that it may be inexpedient to receive those who have scruples concerning infant baptism.† And in 1792 they determined that those who profess a belief in the doctrine of universal salvation through the mediation of Christ, should not be admitted to membership.‡ It is conceded that the Presbyterian Church has at times affirmed a contrary principle, yet, it is manifest from the above authorities that in administration they have been compelled, for the sake of edification, to require other qualification for membership than mere evidence of a gracious state.

* Assembly's Digest, p. 56. † Ib. p. 57. ‡ Ib. p. 75.

Again: In defining the position of the Lutheran Church in the United States, Dr. Schmucker says: "We can see no sufficient warrant for any Christian Church to require as a term of admission or communion, greater conformity of views than is requisite to harmony of feeling, and successful co-operation in extending the kingdom of Christ."* The Lutheran view then is, that we are to require not merely what is necessary to a gracious state, but also, all that may be *requisite to harmony of feeling, and successful co-operation.*"

Again: The Baptists, without exception, deny membership to those who refuse to be immersed: and yet they cordially recognize the Christianity of multitudes out of their own communion.

Again: The Discipline of the Methodists in the United States orders that "none be received into the Church until they shall, on examination by the minister in charge, before the Church, give satisfactory assurances both of the correctness of their faith, and their willingness to observe and keep the rules of the Church."† None will claim, that a

* Luth. Manual, p. 30. † Discipline, chap. II, sec. 2.

willingness to keep the rules of the Methodist Church is essential to a gracious state.

Again: The orthodox Congregationalists have been very pointed and earnest in maintaining that "none who appear to be real subjects of experimental religion should be excluded;" yet, the First Congregational Church of Oberlin, professedly organized on very liberal principles, requires as conditions of membership, "satisfactory evidence of a change of heart by the Holy Spirit, *and* acceptance of the Church Confession of Faith and Covenant."* Its members must accept the Church Confession and *Covenant in addition* to giving satisfactory evidence of a change of heart.

(5.) From these facts and principles it will be seen that administration on the principle that evidence of a gracious state is the *only* qualification for Church membership, is not found practicable, in *any* branch of the Christian Church.

To admit on this principle, does not tend to edification, but destruction. Hence, either such a measure of knowledge, such a unity of faith, and such a holiness of life, as we

* Manual, p. 3.

are nowhere authorized to require, must be demanded as an evidence of a gracious state; or it must be practically conceded, that in addition to such evidence, whatever "may be necessary to harmony and successful co-operation, must also be required." The reception of some, about whose real authority there should be no question, may not be "suitable, for their own edification, or for the peace of the Church."

The conditions of salvation are *not* the conditions of Church membership. Christ may admit to the Church invisible, many whom we cannot, without unfaithfulness to the truth he has committed to us, admit to the Church visible.

CHAPTER III.

THE APPLICATION OF THESE GREAT PRINCIPLES IN ADMINISTERING THE LAW OF MEMBERSHIP.

THE great principles, set forth in the preceding chapter, constitute the law which Christ has established in his Church for the regulation of the matter of membership in it. That law is applicable at all times and in all places. It guided the apostles and primitive Christians; it is our only authoritative guide now. No set of men had any authority for managing the affairs of the Church of Christ on any other principles. The next question relates to their application in the practical work of the Church. To the discussion of this point we now proceed.

SECTION I.—*The Definition of the Qualifications for Membership.*

We require of the applicant a profession of faith in Christ; of repentance of sin;

of belief in the doctrine, and of obedience to the law of Christ, and of submission to the government and discipline he has established in his Church. But these terms are ambiguous. Different men understand by them very different things. If they are not so clearly defined that both the officers and members of the Church may clearly apprehend their meaning, there will be doubt, misunderstanding, confusion, and evil work generally. To leave these terms undefined, so that they may be administered and received in senses as wide apart as the poles, belongs to those juggleries

“That palter with us in a double sense.”

Hence, that there may be precision, unity and efficacy, faith, repentance, the doctrine and the law of Christ, and the government he has established in his Church, must be so distinctly set forth in a formal definition that all may clearly understand what is intended.

At the first, such a definition was not needed. The founders of the Church were divinely commissioned to expound the mind of Christ. When they set forth the word of God and the things concerning his king-

dom, there could be no further controversy ; their utterance settled it. Did any inquire after the mind of Christ, in reference to any question of doctrine or order, the epistle of an apostle in reply could not but be a definitive answer. The collected writings of inspired men constitute the authoritative exposition of the mind of Christ in relation to all matters affecting the salvation of men and the work of the Church. In these, we find the definition of the precise qualifications requisite for admission to the membership of the Church. For a time there was no other creed or confession, and there never would have been any other had all men interpreted the Scriptures alike. But soon men began to differ as to the meaning of the inspired word. Disputes arose as to the doctrine of Christ, first on this point, and then on that. It became necessary for the Church to settle definitely the questions thus raised, and in so doing an article would be framed which would become the creed of the Church—a clear and definite expression of its understanding of the teachings of the Bible in respect to the mooted point. In process of time, as King expresses it, “others

were added in opposition to heresies as they sprung up in the Church." Thus from a single proposition creeds grew, becoming more minute and extended, as, in the progress of events, it became necessary to define the position of the Church in relation to matters on which its members had differed. Thus the few principles of the "Apostles' creed" expanded into the "Westminster Confession of Faith." But let it be noticed particularly, that the growth of the creed does not imply the growth of the faith. The doctrine and law of Christ continues the same. The Bible is its supreme and authoritative expositor, the foundation and test of all creeds. Confessions and testimonies are only the exhibition of the sense in which those who make them understand the doctrines as to which men differ. Matters about which there had arisen no dispute had at first no place in the creed. Later creeds are more voluminous, because heresies have arisen and been maintained in relation to many of the most important doctrines and duties set forth in the word of God. As principles become settled and the Church harmonizes in respect to them, they may be

dropped from the formal creed. Yet they would still continue, as before, a part of the faith of the Church. Being no longer questioned, a distinct testimony for them is unnecessary. The addition of an article to the formal creed of the Church is not an addition to its faith. It is only a clearer and fuller exposition of what had been obscure—a distinct testimony for that which had been forgotten or rejected. The creed is a variable, the doctrine a constant quantity. Creeds are long because heresies are numerous.

The Bible is *the* creed of the Church, all others are but explanatory.

The necessity of such a creed is obvious; the Church in all ages has recognized it. Every denomination has its confession of faith, written or unwritten.

SECTION III.—*The Contents of the Creed.*

The question next arises, "What should the creed of the Church contain?" This question has been much agitated, and very different answers given to it. The truth seems to be this: To accomplish the ends for which it is formed, a creed should be so

full and so complete as to exhibit clearly and specifically the whole doctrine and law of Christ. Those principles and precepts, in respect to which the teachings of the Bible are unquestioned, need not have a place in it. Those in respect to which these teachings are questioned so as to imperil any portion of the doctrine or law of Christ, should be clearly defined. In so far as the creed falls short of this, it fails to do the work for which it is intended. If it goes beyond this, it is guilty of presumption and usurpation. In defining that faith, that repentance, that doctrine and law, and that government and discipline—a profession of which, or a submission to which, the Lord has presented as the qualifications of members in his Church, we should simply ask, what is the mind of Christ, and having ascertained and expressed this, we have completed our work.

Some, however, ask, "Should not the creed be confined to 'essential truth?'" It is freely conceded that some truths are more important and others less. Yet, it will hardly do to frame a creed on the principle of setting forth only "essential truth." A

few considerations will make this position obvious.

1. It is not possible to define essential truth. The finger is not essential to life. It may be cut off, and the man still live. Yet it may cost him his life, and he cannot do his work as well without as with it. His body is no longer a perfect body. The head is essential to life. Sever it from the trunk and it at once becomes lifeless, and yet life continues after the destruction of the body. So with the doctrines of the Gospel. A knowledge or belief of one principle all may confess is not essential to the deliverance of the soul from hell, or its introduction to heaven, and yet it may be necessary that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. Ignorance of it or error in respect to it, may do an individual the most serious injury. A knowledge of another principle all may confess to be essential to an interest in Christ and consequent pardon. These two classes of truths lie at the opposite poles of the doctrine of Christ; but between them are many principles of which it is impossible to affirm that they are essential, or not essential, to saving know-

ledge of Christ. In one sense, all truth revealed by Christ is essential. Every principle has a work of instruction, of warning, of consolation, or encouragement, to perform. He who is ignorant of it, or rejects it, must suffer spiritual loss. In another sense, but very few truths are essential. A very limited knowledge of Christian doctrine, indeed, will suffice to make a sinner so far acquainted with Christ as to exercise a saving faith on him. To draw the line between these two classes of truths has very seldom been attempted, and the results attained by those who have attempted it have been far from satisfactory. The solution of the problem is impracticable, and attempts to solve it are fruitful only in contention and strife. The creed of the Church should not be prepared on an impracticable principle.

2. The word of God throws light on this point. In the great commission it is manifest that the apostles were authorized to baptize men who had not yet been taught all things which the Lord had commanded. Yet it is just as manifest that they were not authorized to admit any who reject anything which the Lord had commanded. The bap-

tized were disciples only in so far as they had been made followers of the doctrine of Christ. Had they rejected anything, they would in that thing not have been disciples. There is not a particle of evidence that a reception of "essential truth" was all that our Lord required in order to discipleship.

We find, moreover, no trace of this distinction in the account left us of the methods of administration adopted by the founders of the Church. Nothing can be more certain than that the candidates for baptism received all the truths taught them, whether "essential" or "non-essential," or that the rejectors of any part of the doctrine of Christ would have been rejected.

The baptized on the day of Pentecost gladly received the "many words" with which Peter testified and exhorted them, and continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. The Samaritans baptized believed Philip preaching "the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ." Paul spake unto the jailor and his household the word of the Lord. Did they receive only so much as was "essential truth?" We find no trace

distinction *directions*

of this ~~directions~~ ^{directions} in the ~~definitions~~ ^{definitions} given by the apostles to the Church in respect to the qualifications for membership in the Church. They speak of the "gospel," the "doctrine of Christ," and of the "faith," and not of "fundamentals" or "essentials."

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

But it is further manifest that a man may be saved without baptism. The observance of this ordinance is not essential to the pardon of sin, yet it is essential to membership in the Church. Subjection to the authority of the Church is not essential to the pardon of sin, and yet it is enjoined by express apostolic precept.

We have no warrant for requiring only "essentials" of candidates for baptism; this distinction is not set forth in the word of God.

3. To confine the creed of the Church to what men might judge to be "essentials," is dangerous to the unity and efficiency of the

Church. The organization and administration of the affairs of the Church on this principle, would admit members holding views widely different in relation to important questions of doctrine, worship, government and discipline. Now one of two results must follow: 1. There will be continual discussion and agitation—now in respect to one question, and now in respect to another. Party feeling and party strife will continually vex and harass the Church, producing bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, and rendering the Church a very inefficient instrument for doing the Lord's work. The history of the Church furnishes many examples of this order of things. Or, 2. There are numerous questions pertaining to matters confessedly not essential, in relation to which silence cannot be enforced. They are practical in their nature, and must be settled in some way, in order that the Church may move at all. The questions pertaining to the mode and subjects of baptism are of this character. No one will affirm that these are essential to salvation; and yet it must be settled, that infants shall be baptized, or that they shall

not; that baptism shall be by immersion, or by aspersion, or in either way. And let it be settled as it may, it will exclude some confessedly Christian men. No conscientious Baptist can be a member of a Pedo-baptist Church. Nor can a conscientious Pedo-baptist be a member of a Baptist Church. Questions of this sort may not be mentioned in the *creed*, but they will be settled very definitely in the *administration* of the Church. And thus, it will come to pass, that many confessedly "non-essentials" will be made, in fact, conditions of Church membership. Wherever a Church, organized on the theory we are controverting, has succeeded to any good degree in maintaining unity, this will be found to be the fact.

Unity, peace, prosperity in the Church, agree in forbidding an organization on the principle of reckoning only "essentials" among the qualifications for membership.

The creed of the Church should not be confined to "essentials;" it should exhibit the whole doctrine and law of Christ.

But it is objected that "such creeds lead to divisions in the Church." To this it may be replied, that divisions grow out of the

blindness of mind and deceitful lusts of the human heart. That they are sinful is freely conceded. The authors of them are verily guilty before God. But in our present condition "offences must needs come." Creeds do not cause them. They rather settle controversies, and make peace. They may lead those who reject them to separate from those who receive them, and organize into distinct bodies of Christian people; but, better this, a thousand times, than the heart-burnings, jealousies, dissensions and general evil work, that prevail among those who attempt to walk together without being agreed. Divisions are sinful, but such unions are more sinful.

The definition of "the faith," or the doctrine of Christ, in a written confession, is solemn work. The Church should approach it with meekness and fear, in a humble, teachable spirit. It should carefully avoid, on the one hand, keeping back what the Lord would have put forward; and on the other, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." For any human document it should entertain no superstitious reverence; but it should be every ready to correct mistakes

in its creed, as soon as discovered; add to, or diminish from it, whatever may be found necessary in order more fully and exactly to exhibit the mind of Christ as revealed in his word. In doing this work, it should never be forgotten that the word of God is supreme, and human documents subordinate. The supreme standards of the Church are infallible; the subordinate, fallible.

SECTION III.—*Forbearance.*

In order to apply the law of membership which the Lord has ordained, the Church must define the sense in which it understands these qualifications, and administer them in that sense. But men are fallible. They may err in defining the mind of Christ. Hence, a rigid, inflexible administration of the law of Christ, as set forth in human confessions, would, in all probability, work wrong against those who may and ought to be admitted to the fellowship of the Church. Hence, the officers of the Church are at liberty to extend forbearance to candidates for membership, and in the administration of discipline. They may forbear, first, with ignorance. A candidate

may have no more knowledge than is necessary to discern the Lord's body in the ordinance of the supper, and yet receive the truth as far as he understands it. The officers of the Church may receive him, bearing with his ignorance, while they seek to remove it. They may forbear, second, with error. The candidate rejects some portion of what the Church has set forth as the doctrine of Christ. What then? If his principles and character, his views of the truth in question, and the truth itself, are such, that being a member of the Church, his influence would tend to mistrust, dissension, disorder and confusion, then he should be rejected. If, however, he is in all respects one who, notwithstanding his error, would contribute to the edification, and not to the destruction, of the Church, he may be received. In deciding the question as to the extent of forbearance, much will depend on the general principles and character of the candidate. An error may be borne with in one, which ought not to be borne with in another.

Such seems to be the true principles of the exercise of forbearance by the Church,

in the admission of members, and the administration of discipline.

SECTION IV.—*Queries.*

Certain questions are sometimes asked in relation to this subject, which we desire to answer.

1. "Why may we not receive men who profess in general terms to receive every truth which they believe Christ has revealed in his word?"

To this we answer, 1. To carry out this principle of administration to its legitimate results, would bring into the Church a perfect medley of truth and error, orthodoxy and heresy. Any man could enter, holding whatever views of the truth of God he pleased. Such an administration would destroy all unity of views in the Church, and consequently all efficiency in the service of Christ. 2. We have just the same authority for receiving men on a profession of "willingness to obey" every law they believe God enjoins in his word. All can see at once, that this method of administration would soon bring to an end all harmony, and render the Church a scene of confusion and

disorder. None, however, plead for such a method. Why then maintain that candidates may be their own judges of doctrine, when they may not of law? 3. But the Church has no right to throw off the responsibility of judging of the qualifications of candidates. The Lord has imposed this duty upon his servants, to whom he has entrusted the "power of the keys;" and hence they have no right to transfer any part of it to others.

Those who plead for this method, we know, commonly require such knowledge and soundness in the faith as they judge necessary to a credible evidence of saving faith, and contend for the application of the principle only in respect to "non-essential truth." But it will be manifest to every one, that this method is liable to all the objections that may be made to confining the contents of the creed to "essentials," and therefore needs no further reply.

2. Again, we hear the objection: "The Church ought to have a creed for its ministers and elders, but why impose it on the membership?"

The Church ought to require of its officers a higher intelligence and purer orthodoxy

than of its members. It may bear with ignorance and error in the latter, which could not be tolerated in the former. A member may be received, provided he adhere to the doctrine set forth by the Church, *as far as he understands it*; the officer is expected to understand it all.

Yet, conceding this, a creed cannot be dispensed with in the admission even of private members, for the following reasons :

1. If we dispense with a creed in the admission of members, we will open the door to all that variety of opinion in relation to the doctrine, worship, government and discipline of the Church, which we have already seen to be fatal to its unity and efficiency.

2. The reasons for requiring consent to the creed of the Church of candidates for the ministry, are applicable to candidates for membership. It is judged important, that ministers should hold the truth as it is in Jesus in its purity, because it is their office to preach and teach; and error in their belief would soon be widely spread among the people. This reasoning is certainly valid; and valid not only for requiring orthodoxy of the officer, but also for requiring it of

the member. Christian parents are required to instruct their children. Scores of the membership of almost every Christian congregation in the land are teachers in Sabbath and other schools. It is their solemn duty to teach the truth as they have opportunity. Is it a matter of no importance whether they hold and teach the pure doctrine of Christ or not? It is the duty of every man and every woman in the Church, to do what they can to spread the truth among men. Is it a matter of no importance whether they propagate the pure gospel of the grace of God, or "another gospel?" There are in the Church many members of talent and learning; many who are often called upon to speak to the people, on moral and political questions, involving important religious truths; it is the fashion for the public lecturer of the day to discuss questions of every variety, in many instances before immense assemblies. Is it a matter of no importance whether these men maintain truth or falsehood? Shall the minister of the gospel be held to a severe reckoning for the errors in doctrine he preaches on Sabbath, and shall a member of his church pro-

claim, with perhaps greater eloquence and learning, before a much larger assembly on Monday, grosser errors, without any responsibility to the authority the Lord has set up in his Church? There seems no reason for the distinction at any time; and particularly none in these days, when the influence of the pews is scarcely less than that of the pulpit.

3. There seems to be no authority for this method of procedure in the word of God. The law of Christ gives no intimation of liberty to the Church to admit to membership those who reject his doctrine. On the contrary, Titus is enjoined to reject the heretic; and we have on record a pointed rebuke to the Angel of the Church of Pergamos for retaining in its communion those who held certain false doctrines.

3. The requirement of Peter was, "Repent and be baptized;" and of Paul, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." You concede that these included everything we have a right to require now. Why not, then, stop here, use these formularies now, without burdening the consciences of men with a man-made creed, and man-made laws?" When

used by the apostles, these terms were clear and definite in their meaning. Men who professed to "repent" and "believe" accepted a well understood system called the "doctrine of Christ," and engaged to yield obedience to a well understood rule of life. When the founders of the Church preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ to the candidates for baptism, they put them in full and complete possession of all that was embraced in the words "repent" and "believe." Their profession was not, therefore, of a loose, ambiguous sort, that might signify anything or nothing. On the contrary, it was precise and explicit. Now, however, there is no inspired apostle or evangelist at hand to define the mind of Christ. The meaning of the inspired documents in our possession, is disputed. And hence, that the Church may be united in a common faith, "walk by the same rule, and mind the same things," it has become absolutely necessary that all these things be clearly defined and set forth in a written creed. Candidates for membership, in accepting and avowing the confession of the Church, comply with

substantially the same requisitions as did the baptized on the day of Pentecost. We do not understand it to be the aim of the Church in its creed to add to, subtract from, or modify the qualifications for membership prescribed by the Lord Jesus. A clear and explicit definition is the end contemplated. Every creed should conform to this principle.

SECTION V.—*Conclusions.*

What, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter? A brief summary will clearly express it.

1. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain the supreme and only infallible law of membership in the Church. This requires a profession, first, of faith in Jesus Christ; second, of repentance unto life; third, of a belief in the doctrine of Christ; fourth, of obedience to the law of Christ; and fifth, of subjection to the government and discipline Christ has established in his Church.

2. It is the duty of the Church to set forth in its creed such a clear and explicit statement of its understanding of the quali-

fications for membership in the Church, and especially of the doctrine and law of Christ, as will enable all candidates to understand what, in the judgment of the Church, the Lord requires.

3. In admitting members, the officers of the Church should carefully examine applicants in respect to their faith in Christ, their repentance, their knowledge and their views of the doctrine of Christ, their knowledge and views of the law of Christ, their readiness to obey it, and their willingness to submit to the government and discipline established in the Church. This examination should be careful and accurate.

4. Applicants will not be required to understand everything set forth in the creed of the Church. If their knowledge is sufficient to constitute a basis for saving faith and a holy life, and if they reject no truth they do understand, they should be received. Those, also, who cannot subscribe to every principle of the creed may be admitted, provided they are such, and the circumstances of the case are such, that their presence in the Church as members would tend, not to "destruction," but to "edification;" if not,

those who reject the truth should themselves be rejected from the Church.

Such is the administration required by the law of "forbearance."

5. The Church should use all diligence to teach her members "all things the Lord has commanded," and to train them to "walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless," that being of "one heart and one soul," they may "walk by the same rule, and mind the same things."

PART SECOND.

THE LAW OF MEMBERSHIP

IN THE

United Presbyterian Church.



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I. **I**N 1643, an assembly, known as the Westminster Assembly of Divines, called by the British Parliament, met in solemn convention. It was composed of the wisest and best men of the three kingdoms. They sat five years, six months, and twenty-two days. They held eleven hundred and sixty-three sessions. Carefully and prayerfully they studied God's word. They wrote out their conclusions, and published them in certain documents, setting forth these as their understanding of the doctrine and law of Christ.

For nearly twenty years the negotiations that resulted in the organization of the Uni-

ted Presbyterian Church, were in progress. The wisest and best men in both the Associate and Associate Reformed Churches labored long and patiently. They altered the Westminster Confession in a few particulars, because they believed its framers mistaken. They set forth in a Testimony their understanding of certain things, in relation to which the Confession and Catechisms are either silent or ambiguous. The documents known as the "Westminster Standards," thus modified, and the declarations of the Testimony, they adopted as their basis of Union, and published them to the world as their understanding of the word of God in relation to all matters therein set forth.

The creed of the United Presbyterian Church has not, therefore, been carelessly prepared. Indeed, it is the result of labors conducted with extraordinary patience and care. Yet it is not infallible. It may be found not to exhibit the "one faith" fully or correctly. It may, in the judgment of the Church, be necessary to add to it, take from it, or modify it in something, to make it a more accurate expression of the mind of Christ. But let that be as it may, it cannot

be regarded as an extemporaneous product of ignorant or reckless men. It deserves respect as the definition of the doctrine and law of Christ, proposed by men as wise and good as are ordinarily to be found in the Church of Christ in any age.

II. 1. The method of administration adopted by the Church is clearly set forth in the following extract from the Book of Discipline :

“Having satisfied the session respecting their knowledge, principles, motives and character, applicants shall be received, on answering affirmatively the following formula of questions, viz.:

“1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the infallible and only rule of faith and practice ?

“2. Do you profess your adherence to the doctrines received by this Church as set forth in the Confession of Faith, Catechisms Larger and Shorter, and Declarations of the Testimony, and do you approve of the Form of Government and Directory for Worship adopted by this Church, so far as you have been enabled to understand them, as agreeable to and founded on the word of God ?

“3. Do you profess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; your acceptance of him as your Saviour, and your resolution, through grace, to continue in the faith; to be subject to the order and discipline of God’s house; to be diligent in your attendance upon divine ordinances, both teaching and sealing, according to your profession; on secret prayer; on family worship, morning and evening, unless providentially hindered; and in the performance of all other duties incumbent on you, whatever station you may occupy in life; that you will study to promote the peace, purity and prosperity of this congregation, while you remain a member thereof; and that you will make conscience of promoting the cause of Christ and his truth, as by other means, so especially by a holy and godly conversation?”

“4. Do you make this profession as in the presence of God, in reliance on his grace, and as you desire to give in your account with joy at the great day?”

From this extract it will be seen that the requirements of the United Presbyterian Church include every item required by the law of membership ordained by the Head of

the Church. He who answers these questions in the affirmative, makes an explicit profession of faith in Christ, and an implied profession of repentance for sin. He also declares his adherence to the doctrine set forth by the Church as the doctrine of Christ, as well as his "readiness to obey" his law and submit to his government and discipline.

2. There is also provision for the ignorant. The applicant is required to declare his adherence to the creed of the Church only so far as he understands it. A child, with a very limited knowledge of gospel truth indeed, may honestly and truthfully answer these questions in the affirmative, and be received to the fellowship of the Church, provided he rejects nothing he does understand. These questions do not require the applicant to receive what he does not understand.

3. But the applicant may say: "I understand this creed very well: but this article I do not believe; I cannot freely subscribe to the standards of your Church." What then? Must we reject him if he does not adhere to every jot and tittle here set

down? Not necessarily. In the act by which we adopted the basis of Union there is what is known as "the forbearance clause." It reads thus: "It is agreed that the forbearance in love, which is required in the law of God, be exercised towards any brethren who may not be able fully to subscribe to the standards of the United Church, while they do not determinedly oppose them, but follow the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." In case of an applicant who cannot fully subscribe to the creed of the Church, it is the duty of the session to consider whether the law of God requires them to forbear with him in his rejection of that particular principle. If it is among the less important truths of the Bible; if he will not determinedly oppose it; if his manner of holding it, and views respecting it; if his whole character and principle are such as to convince the session that his membership in the Church will be for edification and not for destruction, they may and ought to receive him; otherwise, not. For the manner in which the "forbearance clause" is administered, the session is responsible to the courts

above, and should always be ready to give an account.

But it may be said that such an act of administration is inconsistent with the sixteenth article of the Testimony. That article reads thus: "The Church should not extend communion in sealing ordinances to those who refuse adherence to her profession, or subjection to her government, or discipline, or who refuse to forsake a communion which is inconsistent with the profession that she makes, &c." Now the applicant, received under the application of the forbearance clause, does not *refuse* adherence to the profession of the Church, or subjection to her government and discipline. Refusal implies demand. The one is impossible without the other. But the session, in view of his general principles and character, decide to bear with him in his non-subscription to the particular doctrine in question; they do not require of him adherence to it as an indispensable condition of membership. There is no refusal, and consequently no violation of the sixteenth article.

4. Another case may arise. An applicant may declare his adherence to the doctrine of

the Church and readiness to obey its law, but declines to become subject to its government and discipline. What then? Can he be received to membership? Certainly not. Everywhere, in the family, the school, the state; in all societies, literary, benevolent and mercantile, submission to established authority is an inseparable accompaniment to membership. Responsibility is a uniform condition of privilege. Those who enjoy the privileges of membership in the Church, must be responsible to its government and discipline. This principle is vital to the peace, purity, prosperity and good order of the Church. It cannot be dispensed with.

5. But suppose a member of another branch of the Church applies, not for permanent membership, but for certain privileges of membership for a limited time. What then? It is conceded on all hands that circumstances may arise under which persons not permanent members may temporarily be admitted to certain privileges. Its lawfulness, under certain circumstances, has never been questioned. The Fathers conceded it. The only question is, who may be thus admitted, and who not? When and

when not? To these questions it may be answered: (1.) No man may be thus admitted who does not adhere to the profession of our Church as fully and firmly as would be required in order to permanent membership. (2.) No man may be thus admitted who does not, for the time, place himself in subjection to the government and discipline of the Church, and consent to be responsible to it. (3.) No man may be thus admitted whose connection with another branch of the Church is of such a character and under such circumstances that the session would in faithfulness be bound to require him to forsake it. But one whose faith, character and conduct is all that would be required of an applicant for permanent membership, who places himself in subjection to the government and discipline of our Church, and whose connection with another branch of the Church is not such that the session would, in faithfulness, be bound to require him to forsake it, may be admitted to certain privileges of membership. His position in the Church is that of a temporary member. For the time being he is bound by all the obligations and subject to all the responsibilities of

a member. *He is a member.* The privileges of membership belong to membership.

But it is said that such an act of administration is in violation of the sixteenth article of the Testimony. In reply, we answer, not so. The applicant does not *refuse* adherence to the profession of the Church, or subjection to its government and discipline. He does not *refuse* to forsake a communion which is inconsistent with the profession of the Church. He complies with every requisition made upon him by the session; there is no forbearance necessary in his case that is not demanded frequently in admitting permanent members.

6. May we not invite, in a general way, men and women in good standing in their own branch of the Church, to the Lord's table? This question must be answered in the negative. It is the Lord's table, and not ours. If it were our own, we could control it according to our pleasure, invite and refuse as we thought best. As it is, he has placed it under the control of his servants, and authorized them to admit and reject. They must, however, in doing this be governed by the Lord's laws. They are at

liberty to present no qualifications he has not prescribed, and to dispense with none he has required. This obligation he has laid upon them, that they may not roll it off and transfer to each individual the right to judge in his own case. In thus administering this ordinance they would be guilty of unfaithfulness to the solemn trust committed to them. But one may say: "This is my Father's house, I learn; that is a table he has spread for his children. I am a child, and claim a child's privilege in his Father's house." True, this is the Father's house, and this is a table spread for his children; but these are your Father's servants, and he has instructed them to demand of all who come here to claim the privileges of his house, evidences of certain indispensable qualifications. When they, therefore, demand as your credentials, evidence that you are loving, dutiful children, they but do your Father's bidding. Why complain?

7. But it is alleged that the method of administration laid down in the United Presbyterian Testimony, is in direct conflict with the "Confession of Faith," chap. xxvi, sec. 2, in which it is declared that the communion

of saints "as God offereth opportunity is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." We think not. This communion is to be extended to all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ only as "God offereth opportunity." The Testimony simply declares that opportunity is not offered to extend communion to those who refuse adherence to the profession of the Church, or subjection to its government or discipline, or who refuse to forsake a communion inconsistent with its profession. Is communion with such opportune?

8. Before leaving the method of administration followed by the Church, one other point demands attention. The adopting act provides that forbearance should be extended to those who cannot fully subscribe to the standards of the United Church, only as long as "*they do not determinedly oppose them.*" It may be asked, "Why make this proviso?" We reply, it is altogether just, reasonable and necessary. A man may not be able fully to subscribe a doctrine, and yet be admitted to membership, without detriment to the peace, purity, or prosperity of

the Church. But if he wages "determined opposition" to that doctrine, and thus keeps the congregation embroiled, marring its peace and hindering its prosperity, the case becomes very different. No society relishes that sort of thing. No Church is accustomed to forbear long with such disturbers of the peace.

Nor is this provision inconsistent with a just liberty of speech. It does not deny the privilege of expressing opposition to the doctrine in question. It is "*determined opposition*" which the act excepts. No member of any society feels at liberty to talk as he pleases in relation to its constitution or government. No church permits unlimited license in this direction among its members. No Church *can* permit it with any measure of self-respect. "Liberty of speech," while very dear to all, has its bounds and limits, and it should not be excused beyond these. It is the common doctrine of all Presbyterians, that for "publishing such erroneous opinions as either in their own nature, or in the manner of maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ has established in the Church,"

its members" may be lawfully called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the Church.*

But this limitation must not be interpreted to forbid efforts after a change of any part of the standards of the Church, when put forth in an orderly way. It is the privilege of any member of the Church to table, in the proper court, a memorial asking any modification of the constitution of the Church he may desire. Pending action on that memorial, it is the privilege of all to discuss it in a Christian spirit, in all proper ways. Nor should any man be called to account for any sentiment, relating to the question at issue, expressed in the discussion. A conclusion, however, having been reached, quiet, peaceable acquiescence for the time being, becomes, in ordinary cases, at once the duty of all.

III. A few thoughts concerning some other points must close this discussion.

1. According to these principles, grave responsibility rests on the officers of the Church. In applying the qualifications for membership set forth in these pages, they

*Conf. of Faith, chap. xx, sec. 4.

possess large liberty. They must decide the extent of forbearance that may lawfully be allowed in any given case. They need wisdom and prudence, the fear of God, and devotion to his cause. To administer on the principle of extending no forbearance, is easy; to administer on the principle of forbearing with everybody, and every variety of opinion, is just as easy; but to administer on the principle of extending only that forbearance which is consistent with the peace, purity and prosperity of the Church, requires prudence, patience and courage. All should act in view of their responsibility to the superior courts, and to the great Head of the Church himself. People must, to some extent, trust the courts, and the courts, one another, or there will be endless difficulties. While sessions are loyal to the principles of the Church, they must be allowed large liberty in the method of their administration.

2. It is sometimes charged, that our principles are peculiarly bigoted and illiberal. They shut out many from the Church, while the principles of others shut out none. But how is it? A United Presbyterian can enter

any denomination, provided he accepts its principles and yields quiet submission to its government. Any man can enter the United Presbyterian Church, on the very same principle. If a United Presbyterian enters another denomination, disagreeing with it in principle, he must receive forbearance from his new brethren, and he must live quietly and orderly, or he will find no very comfortable home among them. If a member of another denomination not fully agreeing with us in all views of truth and duty, seeks membership with us, we are willing to extend large forbearance towards him, if he does not determinedly oppose our principles, but studies the things that make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another. The disorderly and factious disturber of the Church will meet with but little, if any, rougher treatment at our hands, than at the hands of our more liberal neighbors. It is said that our principles would exclude such men as Martyn, Judson, Hall and M'Cheyne, from the membership of the Church. We reply, not one of them, unless their principles were such as to be beyond the reach of the "forbearance in love" which the law

of God requires, or unless they would refuse subjection to the government and discipline of the Church; and in that case they ought to be excluded.

A United Presbyterian can no more easily enter any other denomination, and be loyal to his principles in it, than a member of any other denomination can enter the United Presbyterian Church and still retain and practice his own peculiar views. Men are organized in different Churches because their convictions differ. While they differ they must remain apart. It is unjust and ungenerous to blame this division on any one denomination. There is not a Church in christendom that is unwilling for universal union to-day, if all others will adopt its principles and enter its organization.

3. It is sometimes feared that our unpopular principles on this subject, prevent our success in doing the Lord's work. There is no ground for this apprehension. The Baptists are the most rigid close-unionists in the world, and yet they increase about twice as rapidly as New School Presbyterians, who administer on as liberal principles as any evangelical Church. Nor have our

New School brethren any advantage over us. Last year they added only seven to a minister, while our additions by profession amounted to seven and eight-tenths, and that, too, with congregations averaging only eighty-eight, while theirs averaged one hundred and four.

Let our ministers but be faithful, "preach the word in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke and exhort, with all long suffering," seeking only to receive the Master's approbation, and the word of God will have free course and be glorified among us even as among others.

4. Our principles permit all the liberty to both officers and members that any church ought to afford. We are as near the mind of Christ as any body of Christians in the world. The writer cannot find any nearer. He has been led to examine the principles of the Church these months past, anew and more carefully; and he is better satisfied with them than ever before. Let us be content, and do the Lord's work as he may give us grace and opportunity. The Church stands up for Christ, his truth and his law; let us stand up for the Church. Let us sus-

tain its schemes, satisfied that its prosperity will be the prosperity of the Lord's kingdom.

5. We know that the principles herein set forth are unpopular. We know that they are increasingly unpopular. A man cannot maintain them without odium. Many men of God think differently. Faithfulness to these principles keeps us from sitting down at the Lord's table with many whom we love and honor; but we cannot help it. We study the Lord's laws, patiently and prayerfully. We find them to teach these principles. We can find in them nothing else. We must do what we believe to be the Lord's bidding. We cannot avoid and should not fear the consequences. It is better that we should suffer hardship than that the Lord's law should be trampled under foot. This hardship will be removed only when we attain nearer to the unity of the Spirit. Then, and not until then, will we all be one, in the Church visible as in the Church invisible. For this end we must wait and watch, work and pray. It will be hastened by our being loyal to our convictions, and by cherishing them.

Diligently and earnestly speaking the

truth in love, let us “grow up unto him in all things who is the Head, even Christ.” Let no epithet of contempt, or assertion of failure, or prediction of disaster, divert or dishearten us. With the truth as our banner, Christ as our leader, the glory of God as our supreme end, and the gathering together of the dispersed of Israel as our subordinate object, let us go forth bearing and glorying in a present cross, confident of a coming victory. The Lord hasten it in his season.

“And yet a banner thou hast given to them who thee do fear,
That it by them, because of truth, displayed may appear.”

We shall be conquerors “*through Him* that loved us and gave himself for us.”

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